

Personnel Recovery

Strategic Importance and Impact

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America's greatest asset is its people.

—President Barack Obama



The breaking news from countless media venues in March 2011 was captivating and compelling: while taking part in coalition operations in Libya, a US Air Force F-15E, call sign Bolar 34, had gone down east of Benghazi. The two crew members had ejected into a chaotic battle between the despotic Libyan regime and opposition forces supported by the coalition. As our nation prayed for the two Airmen, President Barack Obama heard a briefing on the event and monitored the situation as rescue forces from a US Marine task force in the area and opposition ground forces quickly dashed in to

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE NOV 2012		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2012 to 00-00-2012	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Personnel Recovery: Strategic Importance and Impact				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, Fort Belvoir, VA, 22060				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES November-December 2012, Air & Space Power Journal, pgs 83-112					
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15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 31	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

recover both men. In many ways, this heartwarming story resembled accounts of other rescues performed in earlier conflicts. The saga of Bolar 34 joined the lore of rescue missions that grace the proud history of our nation.¹

As this vignette highlights, such dramatic rescue events, referred to as personnel recovery (PR), quickly capture the attention of the American people. However, the body of writing on these missions has mostly focused upon specific events and their operational or tactical aspects. They accentuate the substantial effort that the US Department of Defense (DOD) expends to rescue or assist in the recovery of those American citizens, members of the military, and even allied personnel who are missing, isolated in enemy-controlled territory, or detained. Such efforts are warranted because Americans—the very flesh and blood of our great country, who volunteer to serve our nation—are our most important “resource.”

This article takes a broader look at this mission, primarily in terms of its strategic importance or impact, and demonstrates how PR has engaged and sometimes challenged many of our presidents, their executive subordinate organizations, and our military leaders. It offers our leaders at all levels of command a concise essay on PR, giving them an opportunity to better understand its challenges and the role they may play in its processes. Furthermore, the article points out to them situations in which they may need to become directly involved and the effect that PR may have on their commands or organizations. Overall, it seeks to ensure that leaders at all levels have the knowledge necessary to handle these events. Toward that end, the article analyzes PR at the strategic level of war, examines current national and DOD policy on PR, reviews the evolving threats to our people, presents historical vignettes that illustrate how PR has had a strategic effect in specific instances, and shows how the DOD's PR community has evolved from and with these events. Lastly, it assesses the impact of PR by presenting an amalgamation of noted lessons, which can prove useful in addressing the emerging threats and future challenges to PR.

Personnel Recovery at the Strategic Level of War

Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines the strategic level of war as one “at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational (alliance or coalition) strategic security objectives and guidance, then develops and uses national resources to achieve those objectives.”² The president and his senior leaders provide *strategic direction* to the nation by communicating the necessary overarching guidance, which defines strategic interests through the publication of the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and the *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (NMS). They also use *strategic communication* to engage key audiences both domestically and internationally to “create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives.”³

Emphasizing a whole-of-government approach to our international affairs, the NSS presents four enduring national interests:

- The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners;
- A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
- Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and
- An international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.⁴

President Obama undergirds these interests with the enduring statement that “America’s greatest asset is its people.”⁵ Most assuredly, they are our key resource—one that we will use to achieve our strategic objectives. Keying upon those points, the NMS recognizes that all Americans who serve in our military forces do so by choice:

The all-volunteer force will remain our greatest strategic asset and the best example of the values we represent. . . .

. . . As the challenges we face require a Joint Force that is flexible, agile, and adaptive, it emphasizes people as much as platforms. . . . By successfully contributing to America's security and prosperity, we will continue to advance our Nation's enduring interests well into the 21st Century.⁶

Neither document specifically mentions PR. However, since we have optimized it to protect our "greatest asset," PR is clearly an *implied task* that directly supports our nation's global influence. As further explained by Brig Gen Kenneth Todorov, USAF, and Col Glenn Hecht, USAF, retired (both career rescue officers), "PR protects human capital and denies an adversary the operational and strategic advantages of exploitation."⁷

Our warrior ethos, which comes from this belief, is ingrained with the expectation that we will "Leave No One Behind" and that "Someone Will Come." The American people share this ethos, fully expecting that if any of our personnel are isolated or detained, we will make every effort to get them back. This enduring moral imperative remains an essential element of the way that our nation fights its wars.⁸ The American people also understand that in war, we expect to take losses. They will accept those losses if they believe that the cause we are fighting for is worth the cost. But we must remember the powerful words of Gen James Jones, USMC, former commander of European Command: "The military must have a 'social contract' with the troops and must never see them as expendable."⁹

Personnel Recovery Policy

According to current national policy guidance for PR found in National Security Presidential Directive 12, *United States Citizens Taken Hostage Abroad*, "The taking of US citizens hostage anywhere overseas is a violation of federal [US] law. The policy of the United States is to work diligently to free US citizens held hostage abroad, unharmed."¹⁰ All US government agencies must engage in a whole-of-government,

coordinated response to this challenge. In December 2008, an update to this directive identified hostage taking and kidnapping as growing trends designed to threaten destabilization of developing societies and established national policy for response to hostage taking and PR.¹¹

DOD Directive (DODD) 3002.01E, *Personnel Recovery in the Department of Defense* (2009), the latest version of evolving DOD policy on PR, directly supports national policies and interests:

Preserving the lives and well-being of U.S. military, DoD civilians, and DoD contractor personnel authorized to accompany the U.S. Armed Forces who are in danger of becoming, or already are, beleaguered, besieged, captured, detained, interned, or otherwise missing or evading capture (hereafter referred to as “isolated”) while participating in U.S.-sponsored activities or missions, is one of the highest priorities of the Department of Defense.¹²

It also provides an overarching definition of PR as “the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to prepare for and execute the recovery and reintegration of isolated personnel.” The directive expands the classification of isolated personnel by including “and others designated by the President or Secretary of Defense.”¹³ DODD 3002.01E mandates that each of the military services, US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and the geographical combatant commands shall, in its own unique way, be prepared to carry out this mission.¹⁴

Each service has developed distinct tactics and techniques to perform PR, based upon doctrinal guidance in JP 3-50, *Personnel Recovery*, republished on 20 December 2011. The Air Force and Navy have traditionally focused upon search and rescue and combat search and rescue, whereas the Army uses air and ground forces for this mission. The Marines conduct tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel missions. USSOCOM forces also can conduct PR with their joint assets in direct-action missions for hostage rescue or can employ unconventional assisted recovery capabilities. We have utilized all of these tactical procedures/missions during recent conflicts. The DOD-wide performance of PR with both dedicated and designated forces is well established and validated.¹⁵

A Dangerous World

We must protect our strategic interests from global dangers, including competing nation-states with traditional militaries. Add to that the specter of terrorism—ancient in its form but increasingly evident and willfully and wantonly practiced by a morphing hydra of nonstate organizations or hostile elements such as the narco-terrorists in Latin America or the violent extremist organizations operating worldwide. A leader of one of the latter groups declared, “We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans. . . . We do not have to differentiate between military and civilian. . . . They are all targets.” The author of this statement, Osama bin Laden, may be gone, but his minions and “true believers” fight on, and with them, we are decisively engaged.¹⁶

In terms of PR, this is a clear paradigm shift. Historically, we have considered our military aircrews and special operations forces as those most at risk. Now we must assume that all of our people are potentially in danger worldwide. Our national leaders recognize this change. Recently, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England prepared communications guidance for PR in which he underlined the broad scope of this increased danger in several clarion precepts:

Captivity, detention, and illegal seizure of U.S., allied, and coalition personnel and citizens for exploitation purposes is a relentless and increasing threat to our collective security. . . . Adversaries bolster their credibility and cause by placing a premium on personnel and citizens from the U.S., its allies, and coalition partners. . . . The adversaries' desired effect is to:

1. Gain strategic advantage from a tactical event by weakening our national will and adversely affecting our free and open society.
2. Influence international partners to withdraw from U.S.-backed coalitions and make concessions for the return of captive, detained, or illegally seized personnel or citizens.
3. Degrade the U.S. international and domestic image by creating a sense of weakness and inability to resolve the crisis, in turn increasing the adversary's image of strength and legitimacy of cause.

4. Affect operational resources by diminishing human capital and the will to fight, while limiting freedom of travel and access.
5. Raise the risk of [US government] crisis response and limited contingency operations to increase the operational cost and deter U.S. involvement in operations abroad.¹⁷

This timely, focused guidance defines the new paradigm and invites a sober review of our nation's ability and propensity to perform this mission. To help us in this endeavor, we call upon the rich and extensive history of PR.

Representative Personnel Recovery Vignettes

This section reviews a representative collection of specific events and conflicts that exhibit strategic impact. In every instance, senior national leaders were directly involved in one form or another. The history describes how our PR community evolved into its current form—a key PR event itself.

Royal Air Force, Great Britain, 1940

One of the most notable events involved the dilemma facing Great Britain in 1940 as Germany unleashed its air forces upon that country in a series of strategic attacks in preparation for a ground-force invasion. The Royal Air Force (RAF) launched its fighter forces to defend the nation. Between 10 July and 10 August, it lost 220 pilots, killed or missing, most of them over the waters of the English Channel. As losses continued to mount, Prime Minister Winston Churchill clearly understood that unless his commanders could stanch this slow drain of the nation's best aviators, the strategic advantage could tip to Germany. He directed his commanders to take action. The RAF fighter pilots were not just a critical resource but a strategic center of gravity.¹⁸

The government had already begun programs to increase pilot production and transfer pilots from other commands and had drafted directives to limit air combat over the North Sea and English Channel as

much as possible. However, the British could not completely eliminate these battles. They had a sea-rescue force although it proved insufficient for the immediacy of the need at hand. Air commanders quickly developed a structure for a larger joint RAF / Royal Navy rescue organization. Within the next year, as the joint rescue force matured, air-sea rescue saved 444 aircrew members, successfully husbanding a critical resource that directly contributed to the strategic defensive efforts of the RAF.¹⁹

This action produced secondary and long-term effects. As the US Army Air Forces began to deploy overseas, the commander, Gen Henry “Hap” Arnold, saw the efficacy of the RAF example and formed rescue squadrons for duty in all theaters of war. These units, which had recovered nearly 5,000 American aircrew members, represented the embryo that would eventually become the Air Rescue Service of the US Air Force when it became a separate service in 1947. However, we could not account for tens of thousands of Americans (specifically, 73,681) lost in the war.²⁰

Korea, 1950–53

From June 1950 to July 1953, the United States, as part of a broad coalition under United Nations (UN) mandate, engaged the invading forces of North Korea and, later, Communist China. The US Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps all deployed rescue units equipped with various fixed-wing aircraft and newly developed helicopters. This technological breakthrough allowed for the recovery of downed aircrews and ground personnel from almost any location, showing how evolving technology could be utilized for the recovery mission. The Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps units recovered 254, 364, and 33 allied personnel, respectively. Very concerned about captured Americans, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower insisted that any cessation of hostilities provide for the return of all personnel, as specified in Article 3 of the armistice agreement. Subsequently, the Koreans released 4,428 American military

members. We continue to conduct recovery operations for the 7,947 Americans still listed as missing from that conflict.²¹

As our troops returned home, though, disturbing stories began to surface, pointing to misconduct on the part of many individuals held prisoner. Some of them succumbed to brainwashing and were used by the enemy as propaganda tools or for political exploitation. Debriefings and analyses determined that 192 people were chargeable with serious offenses against their fellow prisoners. Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson recommended development of a code of conduct to train all personnel at risk of becoming isolated or captured. President Eisenhower concurred, signing Executive Order 10631, which created the code that directed the conduct of our personnel as prisoners of war (POW) or who otherwise find themselves in a situation where they must survive, evade, resist, or escape (SERE). In response, all services began SERE schools for their personnel.²²

U-2 Incident, Soviet Union, 1960

President Eisenhower would be bedeviled by another PR event. On 1 May 1960, a US U-2 reconnaissance aircraft piloted by Francis Gary Powers took off from the military airfield at Peshawar, Pakistan, to photograph strategic missile sites in the Soviet Union, where air defense forces shot it down.²³ Powers parachuted from the aircraft. Unfortunately, the nearest rescue forces, more than 1,000 miles away in Europe, had neither the training nor equipment to perform such a rescue, so Powers was quickly captured.²⁴

Unaware of his fate, the US government issued a press release stating that an American aircraft had “gone missing” over northern Turkey because of oxygen-equipment problems. Premier Nikita Khrushchev declared that a spy plane had been shot down over the Soviet Union but did not mention the capture of the pilot. A spokesman for President Eisenhower reinforced the earlier statement by adding that the Soviet claim might concern the same aircraft but that “there was absolutely

no . . . deliberate attempt to violate Soviet airspace. There never has been.”²⁵

On 7 May, Khrushchev’s announcement that his forces had recovered the pilot alive, as well as substantial portions of the aircraft, deeply embarrassed the Eisenhower administration. The president planned to attend a summit two weeks later with Khrushchev and other top world leaders in Paris, where they would possibly reach agreement on key issues such as a disarmament treaty, a ban on nuclear weapons testing, and the status of Berlin, still unresolved from World War II. After arriving, though, Khrushchev demanded an apology from President Eisenhower, who refused, so Khrushchev boycotted the conference, negating any agreements and destroying goodwill that had developed between the two leaders. In this case, the lack of an available recovery capability limited larger strategic capabilities with political and diplomatic implications.²⁶

Southeast Asia, 1961–75

During the long involvement in Southeast Asia, four American presidents found themselves deeply engaged in war, and all had to deal with PR in some capacity. In the early years, the State Department was responsible for Americans on a country-by-country basis, and when enemy forces captured a few US military and civilian personnel, American diplomats tried “gentle persuasion” to gain their release. After the signing of the Geneva Accords on Laos in 1962, the United States removed all of its military from that country, which then returned all captured personnel.²⁷

As US emphasis shifted to South Vietnam, more Americans—both military and civilian—were taken prisoner. Diplomatic efforts proved insufficient, and when the number of American military personnel began to increase, the US military introduced conventional rescue forces into the theater, directed by a joint rescue coordination center (JRCC).²⁸

As the war expanded, an ever-increasing number of American Airmen became incarcerated in North Vietnamese prisons. Noting the insufficiency of diplomatic efforts, senior leaders in the DOD ordered creation of the joint personnel recovery center (JPRC) in Saigon as a subcommand of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). Acting as a clearinghouse for intelligence on American POWs, it could also request that assets of the MACV Studies and Observation Group be used to conduct rescue operations when feasible.²⁹ However, the JPRC had no operational control over any tactical assets. In most cases, recovery forces were not available quickly enough to respond to perishable intelligence. Additionally, the JPRC could not operate in Laos without ambassadorial approval. Until its inactivation in 1972, the center successfully orchestrated the recovery of several hundred Vietnamese and Korean soldiers but no Americans.³⁰

By 1968, after more than 400 Americans had been taken prisoner, the wives and families of many of these men began to speak out about their harsh treatment and political exploitation by the enemy. Organizations such as the League of Families became very powerful lobbying entities that forced the US government to address POW issues and that met with representative groups to voice their concerns. Because Presidents Johnson and Nixon had to respond to pressure from this league and other groups, the North Vietnamese saw the political value of holding US prisoners, as had the North Koreans in the earlier conflict.

In November 1970, President Nixon approved an operation by US military forces to rescue American POWs held at the Son Tay prisoner camp, 30 miles northwest of Hanoi. Theater rescue forces conducted a well-planned, -rehearsed, and -executed mission. Unfortunately, the prisoners there had been moved, so none were recovered. However, the raid forced the North Vietnamese to centralize all US prisoners and treat them better.³¹

As America began to withdraw from the war and initiated peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese, the status and release of the POWs became a primary issue, as it had in Korea. At one point, Presi-

dent Nixon publicly stated that he would not completely withdraw US forces from Vietnam until Hanoi had released all POWs.³² Article 8 of the treaty, finally signed in Paris on 27 January 1973, contained specific language detailing the release of all American POWs. Subsequently, the North Vietnamese freed 591 Americans, military and civilian, but more than 2,400 Americans remained unaccounted for in the theater.³³

Residual US military forces remained in-theater, mostly in Thailand. As the North Vietnamese Army overran South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975, these forces supported noncombatant evacuation operations from Saigon, South Vietnam, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia. In May, when pirates seized the American ship *SS Mayaguez* near Koh Tang Island, Cambodia, President Gerald Ford ordered a recovery operation for the crew and ship, fearing a replay of the North Korean seizure of the US Navy ship *Pueblo* seven years earlier. He and his senior advisers closely monitored the subsequent operation, which recovered the crew and ship. However, four helicopters were destroyed and 41 US personnel killed—an unsatisfying end to a long and divisive war.³⁴ The United States learned many lessons concerning the need to preposition recovery forces in any conflict, the reality of political and diplomatic limitations on recovery operations, and the undeniable fact that the American people did not deem lightly those lost and that they expected our military forces to maintain a rescue capability.

Seizure of the US Embassy, Iran, 1980

In November 1979, radical followers of Imam Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran overthrew the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, seizing the American Embassy in Tehran and 53 Americans. President Jimmy Carter directed that the military take *all* actions to free the hostages. Through the winter and spring, diplomatic efforts abounded but to no avail. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown directed Maj Gen James Vaught, USA, to “prepare a plan and train a force to rescue American citizens illegally held in Iran.”³⁵

Naming the project Operation Eagle Claw, Vaught developed his assigned service elements into a joint task force. The US Navy supplied eight RH-53D heavy-lift helicopters, launched from ships and flown by US Marine pilots. They would fly to a landing zone designated Desert One, deep in Iran. Air Force MC-130s would land with an Army assault element that would then transfer to the helicopters for movement to the suburbs of Tehran. The Soldiers would seize the American Embassy and move the hostages to a nearby soccer stadium. Then the helicopters would land in the stadium and ferry the hostages and Soldiers to another remote airfield where Air Force cargo aircraft would land and recover all personnel.³⁶

When diplomatic efforts failed, President Carter authorized the execution of Eagle Claw. On the evening of 24 April, the helicopters lifted off the deck of the USS *Nimitz* and headed for Desert One. En route, though, they encountered a terrible dust storm, and two aircraft experienced mechanical problems, returning to the *Nimitz*. The other six pressed on. Upon arrival, a third crew reported that their aircraft was severely broken. Because the mission required six helicopters, Col Charles Beckwith, USA, the on-scene-commander, aborted it. As the Soldiers and Airmen scrambled to organize their departure, one of the helicopters collided with an MC-130. The resulting explosion and fire killed eight Americans and seriously wounded five more. The failed mission dealt a devastating blow to the United States' prestige and image around the globe.³⁷

President Carter directed formation of another task force for a second attempt. He also continued diplomatic efforts to secure release of the hostages. However, the Iranians were unrelenting, believing that they could weaken Carter and possibly extract concessions from him as he faced reelection in November. Although his administration reached an agreement with the Iranians for the return of the hostages, the failure to rescue them severely damaged President Carter politically. According to *Time Magazine*, "For Carter in particular, and for the US in general, the desert debacle was a military, diplomatic,

and political fiasco.”³⁸ His national approval rating, 75 percent when Iran seized the hostages, plummeted to 20 percent after Desert One. In November he lost the presidential election to Gov. Ronald Reagan of California. Postelection polls indicated that fully 50 percent of voters voted *against* Carter rather than *for* Reagan.³⁹

We can draw another major strategic implication from these events—that the United States would have to prepare itself to deal with an ominous revolution in the Islamic world led by a cabal of leaders who saw the West in general and the United States in particular as the “Great Satan.” Consequently, the United States maintained a task force organized for the second attempt. When Congress subsequently directed an entire reorganization of the US military to facilitate activation of USSOCOM on 16 April 1987, that task force was an integral, core element of the new command.⁴⁰

Operation Desert Shield/Storm, 1990–91

On 2 August 1990, Iraqi military forces invaded Kuwait. President George H. W. Bush ordered a strong US response and began building a coalition to stop the Iraqis from continuing into Saudi Arabia and to force them to leave Kuwait eventually. He also specified that casualties be held to a minimum.⁴¹

When all diplomatic and economic efforts to evict the Iraqis failed, Gen Norman Schwarzkopf, USAF, the theater commander, initiated combat operations to do so. The entire campaign lasted six weeks. To limit losses, the air forces aggressively attacked the Iraqi air defense forces. Additionally, the better-designed post-Vietnam aircraft equipped with radar-jamming devices and precision-guided weapons gave the better-trained aircrews enhanced capability to avoid those air defenses.⁴²

Lt Gen Charles Horner, USAF, the joint force air component commander, who had responsibility for theater rescue, formed a JRCC to coordinate necessary actions. However, he did not receive any Air Force rescue squadrons to perform the tasking. Because of command

reorganizations and the transfer of the most capable helicopters to US-SOCOM, the Air Force's Air Rescue Service squadrons were equipped with old, operationally limited Vietnamese-era machines. Consequently, the helicopter and ground assets of the USSOCOM component of US Central Command—deployed to Saudi Arabia and Turkey—conducted the recovery missions. However, in some cases, this arrangement did not work smoothly, generating delays in recovery efforts. During the conflict, the Iraqis shot down 43 coalition aircraft, and one Army truck inadvertently drove into enemy territory. A total of 89 coalition troops were involved in these incidents, 48 killed in the isolating event and eight rescued. Thirty-two became POWs, and one was missing. Analysis indicated that as many as eight more individuals were recoverable, but US forces did not rescue them because of overall problems with command and control and an inability to locate the survivors quickly. The enemy exploited many of these troops for propaganda purposes. At the cessation of hostilities, General Schwarzkopf met with Iraqi commanders to set the terms and conditions of the cease-fire, making his first directive the return of all allied POWs and remains. The Iraqis quickly complied, handing over everyone except for one missing aviator, whose remains were eventually found and returned from Iraq in 2009.⁴³

In response to the deficiencies noted in the conflict, the Joint Services SERE Agency (JSSA), was activated at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, on 15 November 1991 as a field operating agency of the Air Force. Its personnel begin working with combatant commands to develop both theater escape and evasion plans as well as plans and procedures for recovery of isolated personnel. The JSSA helped develop a requirement that each combatant command create a standing JRCC, with the personnel, equipment, and authorities necessary to command and control available rescue forces. In 1993 Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney activated the Defense POW / Missing Personnel Office, authorized and directed to oversee and manage issues concerning POWs and personnel missing in action and to craft necessary policy. It worked closely with the JSSA for what would become known as PR.⁴⁴

Blackhawk Down, Somalia, 1993

In response to a humanitarian disaster unfolding in Somalia in August 1992, President Bush directed the US military to initiate Operation Provide Relief as part of a larger UN effort. Americans delivered supplies for an estimated 3 million starving people as warring factions battled for control of the nation. The president directed the Marines and Army to carry out an operation labeled Restore Hope, deploying a combat force to work with other coalition forces to establish peace and stability.

When President Bill Clinton assumed office in January 1993, he continued the mission. However, one local faction led by Mohamed Farrah Aidid resisted calls for a peaceful resolution and became increasingly confrontational.⁴⁵ Clinton ordered the deployment of a US special operations joint task force of 500 troops, which attacked a building in Mogadishu on 3 October to capture a key Aidid leader and his subordinates. As the Soldiers assaulted the building, Somalis swarmed to the site and engaged the task force, killing 18 Americans and wounding 73. Additionally, they shot down two helicopters—prophetically, the rescue helicopters for the mission. Somalis overran the crash sites, killed all of the Americans except CW3 Michael Durant, mutilated the bodies of the dead Americans, and dragged them through the streets.⁴⁶

Americans reacted with shock and anger because they had not realized that “mission creep” had drawn our Soldiers into direct combat. “We came here to feed people,” screamed *Time Magazine*. “The US will help the U.N. peacekeepers as it can, but the US will not allow itself to become another fighter-killer among factions in the streets and alleys of Mogadishu.” The *New York Times* was blunter, declaring, “Somalia, time to get out!”⁴⁷

As President Clinton sought a diplomatic solution to the unfolding debacle, he dispatched a senior aide to Somalia to arrange the release of CW3 Durant. The House passed a resolution calling upon the president to secure the immediate return of all military members held by the enemy, recover the remains of all those killed, and begin a with-

drawal of all US forces from Somalia.⁴⁸ Senator John McCain (R-AZ) said that no military mission existed in Somalia, adding, “Someone ought to tell [the president] . . . it’s time to bring the troops home.” The *Cincinnati Enquirer* added, “Escalating casualties and fighting are wasting US lives in Somalia.” The criticisms became so acrimonious that Secretary of Defense Les Aspin was forced to resign.⁴⁹ President Clinton announced a withdrawal plan for all US forces as his envoy quietly arranged for the release of Durant with a warning to the Somalis that delay could possibly generate the need for a much more violent American response. Aidid agreed to release him.⁵⁰

Sensing that the American people had developed an aversion for casualties, President Clinton adopted that view—one reflected in future uses of military force. Rather than casualties, however, the American people abhorred the loss of our men and women for no useful purpose, as explained by General Jones earlier in this article.⁵¹ Public support for the Somalia effort had clearly waned. In a Yankovich Partners survey of 7 October that asked whether Americans approved of US troops in Somalia, 36 percent of the respondents said yes, and 60 percent said no. Responding to a question that asked them to identify an important goal of the United States in Somalia, 96 percent said, “Making sure US Soldiers taken prisoner are released,” and 89 percent said, “Bringing US troops home as soon as possible.”⁵² Obviously, the American people did not believe that our actions in Somalia were worth the cost. In this incident, the lack of a sufficient recovery capability degraded our realization of larger strategic goals.

An Evolving Personnel Recovery Community

By 1996 the JSSA had evolved into the focal point for PR and was working directly with the combatant commands and Joint Staff. It sponsored a conference at which everyone understood that PR referred to everything—training, equipage, doctrine, organization, and so forth—done to facilitate the recovery of personnel. In response to requests from the combatant commands, the agency began classes to

train personnel to serve in the theater JRCCs, subsequently renamed joint search and rescue centers (JSRC). The JSSA also held a series of conferences to develop a truly joint standard for the SERE training of personnel in all services. During the year, President Clinton signed the Missing Persons Act, which directed the Defense POW / Missing Personnel Office to “establish policies, which shall apply uniformly throughout the Department of Defense, for personnel recovery (including search, rescue, escape, and evasion).”⁵³ Within a year, the department had published DODD 2310.2, *Personnel Recovery*, which established DOD policy for PR, and spawned several subordinate and specially focused directives. In a parallel effort, the Joint Staff drafted and published three joint doctrinal publications—JP 3-50.2, *Doctrine for Joint Combat Search and Rescue*; JP 3-50.21, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Combat Search and Rescue*; and JP 3-50.3, *Joint Doctrine for Evasion and Recovery*, which established a joint standard for PR. These documents defined a structure for a theater PR plan and presented joint tactics, techniques, and procedures. Combined with DODD 2310.2, they reflected a great deal of historical experience analyzed and consolidated to supply an evolving standard for all of the DOD.⁵⁴

Two Rescues in Serbia, 1999

In March US military forces joined in combat operations against Serbia as part of an effort by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to compel that country to cease its campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Kosovo region of the former Yugoslav Republic. NATO leaders feared that a large number of casualties would act as a strong constraint on the operation and decided to limit their initial actions to an air campaign. President Clinton understood this constraint. In approving American participation, he said that “there are risks in this military action—risks to our pilots and the people on the ground. . . . I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war.”⁵⁵

On the fourth night of the operation, a US Air Force F-117 was shot down about 30 miles northwest of Belgrade. Again, the United States had dispatched a significant PR task force from USSOCOM, consisting of a team of helicopters modified with state-of-the-art navigation and communications equipment, numerous supporting aircraft, and a mature command apparatus. The helicopters launched from a forward base in Bosnia. As enemy forces closed in around the survivor, the rescue force flew through a layer of fog and retrieved the pilot.⁵⁶

Although the Serbians exploited images of the F-117 wreckage, the air campaign continued. Six weeks later, another aircraft, a US Air Force F-16, was shot down at night in Serbia. A similar rescue task force sallied forth and recovered the pilot. During the short conflict, no Americans were unaccounted for.⁵⁷ As in previous conflicts, US forces exploited evolving technology and improved training that gave PR sufficient capability to limit US losses and support the larger strategic operations.

Evolution of the Personnel Recovery Community Continues

On 1 October 1999, in an action to enhance oversight of the PR mission area, the JSSA combined with the Air Force–assigned Joint Combat Search and Rescue Agency to become the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA), which had a much broader charter. Specifically, it would act as the DOD’s office of primary responsibility for PR and serve as the “principal DOD Agency for Joint Personnel Recovery support.” Additionally, it was assigned to Joint Forces Command at Norfolk, Virginia, whose commander served as the DOD’s executive agent for PR. Almost immediately, JPRA personnel became involved with the combatant commands, participating in training exercises, making staff-assistance visits, and conducting mission-area assessments. The JPRA also placed command representatives at each combatant command headquarters and at the Joint Staff in the Pentagon. These individuals had access to the command senior leaders and staffs and worked with them steadily on PR matters. They scripted several PR

tasks within the Universal Joint Task Lists, used to develop training programs and insert PR planning considerations into the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System, utilized to write operational plans and orders. Furthermore, the JPRA steadily expanded its training capability, developing classes for rescue forces as well as the commanders and their staffs. The courses specifically dealt with risk mitigation—the process of balancing risk to personnel with carrying out the overall operational mission. The JPRA created the Personnel Recovery Education and Training Center to oversee and conduct this training and education. By the end of 2001, the center had trained 1,298 personnel for assignment to recovery forces, planning cells, operational centers, or JSRCs in the various service staffs or combatant commands. This evolutionary process itself was a significant PR event.⁵⁸

Operation Enduring Freedom, 2001, Ongoing; and Operation Iraqi Freedom / Operation Odyssey Dawn, 2003–11

In response to the horrific events of 11 September 2001, US forces rapidly deployed to US Central Command for operations in Afghanistan. President G. W. Bush directed that the campaign not begin until PR forces were in place. Initially, those forces were assigned to special operations helicopter units deployed to Uzbekistan and Pakistan. However, within two months, US Air Force rescue teams replaced them. Further, many of the personnel serving in the various PR command and control centers had graduated from the JPRA training courses.⁵⁹

In March 2003, President Bush directed US Central Command to conduct combat operations against Iraq. PR planning was fully integrated into the campaign plan. Each service component and the special operations forces deployed or designated forces to conduct PR. Three US Air Force rescue task forces of HH-60s, HC-130s, and para-rescue Airmen deployed. The US Army, Marine Corps, and Navy also had designated recovery task forces and elements with their forces.⁶⁰

Most personnel who served as PR representatives on the various combatant staffs or in the renamed JPRC or subordinate headquarters

were trained by the JPRA and fully conversant with the steadily updated policies and doctrine of PR. Through May 2003, US forces conducted 81 PR missions that recovered 109 personnel and rescued eight POWs. Moreover, the United States accounted for all personnel.⁶¹

Nevertheless, combat operations did not end in either theater, and PR forces remained engaged in both arenas as enemy forces steadily attempted to take Americans prisoner. Perhaps no such instance proved more poignant than the disappearance of PFC Keith Maupin, USA, taken in a convoy ambush in Iraq in April 2004. Peter Schoomaker, Army chief of staff, spoke of him frequently to keep his commanders concentrated on PR. Maupin's remains were found in March 2008 and returned to his family.⁶²

Throughout the long conflicts, service components conducted PR missions in support of their operations in both theaters. US military operations ended in Iraq in December 2011, and a full accounting of our PR activities there is under way. However, as of March 2012, only one US military and three DOD contractors remained unaccounted for in Iraq and Afghanistan—a stunning accomplishment compared to the number of missing personnel during the long war in Southeast Asia.⁶³

The Evolution Continues

Constantly learning from the ongoing operations, the JPRA and Defense POW / Missing Personnel Office steadily worked with all portions of the PR community to improve the disparate aspects of the effort. In 2002 the National Security Council published the earlier-noted National Security Presidential Directive 12—the government-wide policy guidance for PR. Subsequently, the Joint Staff updated JP 3-50, which consolidated all three of the publications initially written in the mid-1990s. Further, in 2009, DODD 2310.2 was updated and then replaced by DODD 3002.01E, *Personnel Recovery in the Department of Defense*, 16 April 2009, which now offers the DOD's current overarching PR policy. Thus, the evolution is ongoing.

Bolar 34, Libya, March 2011

This event, mentioned at the beginning of this article, deserves a fuller narrative. In response to a UN resolution directing military action to stop the actions of Libyan leader Mu‘ammar Gadhafi, President Obama directed the US military to conduct Operation Odyssey Dawn as part of a larger UN air campaign. Again, the action would not involve American ground forces. Like President Clinton, President Obama acknowledged that the campaign could place American Airmen at risk but felt that the gain justified the costs: “We’re confident that not only can the goals be achieved, but at the end of the day the American people are going to feel satisfied that lives were saved and people were helped.” On 19 March, US and NATO forces began striking Libyan targets to impose a no-fly zone for Gadhafi’s aerial units and to protect the Libyan people.⁶⁴

Three nights later, the Air Force F-15E went down. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and President Obama received notification of the incident and updates as they became available. In support of the operation, the US Marine Corps 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, operating off the Libyan coast, quickly rescued the pilot. Libyan opposition forces recovered the weapon systems officer and later passed him over to US control. President Obama received word of the recovery. Conceivably, if Gadhafi’s forces had captured the two men, paraded them before the press, and possibly executed them, those actions could have significantly altered Americans’ support of Libyan operations, as happened almost 18 years earlier in Somalia.⁶⁵ However, that did not happen. At the cessation of combat operations on 31 October 2011, the United States had accounted for all military and civilian personnel in that operation.⁶⁶

Impact

The previous vignettes, though varied, contain a common message: PR, or a lack thereof, can have a strategic impact and a number of con-

sequences. This fact is especially applicable as we deal with the clear paradigm shift that now puts our people at risk worldwide. However, within the larger context, several other subordinate points can serve as noted lessons.

First, all incidents of the kind mentioned above engage senior national leaders. As observed in our experiences in Southeast Asia, political or diplomatic considerations can limit PR. History also shows us that PR events can prove unpredictable and quickly evolve into international scenarios in which the hostile elements holding our troops can exploit them for political advantage, a phenomenon first identified in Korea and certainly relevant today. Additionally, PR events can have a domestic political effect. PR forces can limit our losses, prevent the exploitation of our troops, and—as shown in the British example, Operation Desert Storm, Serbia, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the Bolar 34 mission—stop the erosion of national will. Furthermore, in the U-2, Iran, and Somalia events, PR capabilities can enable or limit other strategic capabilities or operations. As the Libya example makes clear, there is no doubt that our national leaders understand the moral imperative of PR. It is also evident that at the tactical level, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines who actually have to carry out the mission share that understanding, as demonstrated by their efforts at Koh Tang Island and in Serbia and Libya. However, several examples—the RAF in World War II, the U-2 incident, and the Mogadishu vignettes—suggest that at intermediate levels, PR planning and preparation were not as robust as they needed to be for the existing conditions and threats.

The evolution of the PR community was intended to address those shortfalls. Based upon difficult lessons learned in the cited events as well as others, this evolution exploits maturing technology and stresses specific, focused training for personnel who may become isolated, for commanders and staffs, and for recovery forces. We have now institutionalized PR planning in policy, doctrine, and practice—planning that emphasizes the necessity of having PR forces in place prior to the

initiation of military operations. It supports either unilateral operations or actions as part of coalitions and alliances.

Interlaced with and because of these events, the DOD's PR capability has evolved steadily and positively, and the macro results speak for themselves. At the end of our involvement in Southeast Asia, more than 2,400 US personnel were missing. Searches for them continue today. After Desert Storm, the remains of the sole missing American have been returned. We can account for all personnel from our operations in Bosnia, Serbia, and Libya. Currently, after 10 continuous years of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa, we list one military and three DOD civilian contractors as missing.⁶⁷ That is a huge shift in results, and although analysis must fully explain this evolving development, it appears to reflect and parallel the efforts made to improve and institutionalize PR. This process recently received further reinforcement when the JPRA was reassigned from the inactivating Joint Forces Command and designated a Chairman's Controlled Activity under the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the Joint Staff J7 as its lead directorate.⁶⁸

However, significant challenges remain. The DOD's PR capabilities have grown dramatically, but they cannot maintain continuous coverage worldwide. Additionally, the department does not necessarily always have the authority to operate outside a combat area. In fact, in most parts of the world, the lead US agency is the Department of State, its embassy led by a chief of mission (COM) (usually an ambassador but possibly someone of lower rank) responsible for US citizens in that particular country. The COM may have to rely on host-nation support to provide authority and capability. The necessary nation-to-nation relationships can prove unique and problematic, suggesting that US personnel in areas beyond quick DOD response represent a potential *strategic vulnerability* that could lead to more tactical incidents with potentially strategic consequences.

This implies that we need to do much more at the COM and inter-agency levels. Recent COM-led efforts to create a proper combination

of responsibility, authority, and capability in Iraq suggest the way forward and may offer a format for a comparable PR structure for Afghanistan when US forces depart that theater. This is a fertile area for further analysis and debate. Moreover, it should include vigorous discussion of how the DOD's PR assets can be integrated into the efforts of the COM and other interagency partners for an all-encompassing, whole-of-government approach as prescribed by National Security Presidential Directive 12.⁶⁹

However, at this juncture, we remain heavily involved in Afghanistan. Certainly, we recognize the existence of adversaries—both conventional and asymmetric—throughout the world. In response we continue to mature our PR capability, arguably the best in the world. President Obama addressed this issue squarely after the rescue of an American and a Danish hostage in Somalia in January 2012: “The United States will not tolerate the abduction of our people, and will spare no effort to secure the safety of our citizens and to bring their captors to justice. This is yet another message to the world that the United States of America will stand strongly against any threats to our people.”⁷⁰

Such capability and propensity are timely and necessary. They meet the expectations of the universal value held by Americans that the United States will make “every effort” to recover our serving sons and daughters if they become isolated on the battlefield or captured by hostile forces. In that effort, our PR community helps undergird our enduring national interests and directly supports President Obama's declaration, mentioned previously, that “America's greatest asset is its people.” That is the strategic importance and impact of personnel recovery. ★

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